

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



MIDNITE MINE SUPERFUND SITE, WELLPINIT, WASHINGTON

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 10

May 2004

You are Invited to a Public Meeting

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) invites you to learn about possible ways to clean up Midnite Mine:

Tuesday, June 8, 2004

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Fire Management Conference Room

Open House: 1:00 — 4:00 p.m.

Public Meeting: 4:30 — 6:30 p.m.

The BIA Fire Management Building is the yellow building on the Ford-Wellpinit Road, a quarter of a mile north of the Wellpinit High School.

Open House

Come to EPA's informal open house to learn about mine cleanup methods and how they work. We want to present this information to the community now, because later this year we will propose a cleanup plan for Midnite Mine and ask for your comments.

At the informal open house, we will show how mine sites similar to Midnite Mine have been "reclaimed" in other parts of the country and around the world. We'll have some activities to help you start thinking about what might be best for Midnite Mine. Bring your questions and learn more about Midnite Mine—an important part of the Spokane Tribe's past, present and future.



The steep walls of Midnite Mine's Pit 4 testify to nearly 30 years of uranium mining.

Public Meeting

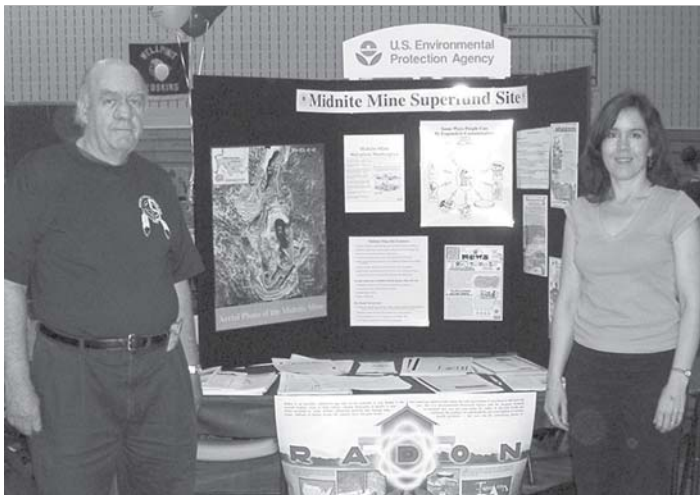
After the open house, we will hold a public meeting. We'll talk about the study of Midnite Mine, including the cleanup plans we're considering and the schedule. We also will give you details about the cleanup of spilled ore on the Ford-Wellpinit Road (*see next page*). We are moving forward on planning cleanup of the ore, and we want to make sure you hear the latest news.

By the Way

On April 29, **Elly Hale** and **Debra Sherbina** hosted a table at the Spokane Tribe Department of Health and Human Services' annual Health Fair at the Wellpinit High School. **Randy Connolly** from the Spokane Tribe's Department of Natural Resources was also there. We enjoyed meeting lots of kids—and adults!

People took home information about the health effects of radiation and how to protect themselves. They also asked a lot of questions about radon, an invisible gas that comes from the ground and can collect in houses at unsafe levels. Information is provided on page 4 of this fact sheet. To learn more, call Elly or Debra toll-free at 1-800-424-4372.

Randy Connolly and Debra Sherbina at EPA's table—Tribe's 2004 Health Fair



Roadside ore to be removed this year

EPA is continuing to work with the Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to get permission from property owners for access to properties along the Ford-Wellpinit Road. EPA needs access to remove Midnite Mine ore spilled from trucks during transport to the Dawn Mill at Ford. We've had a good response, and once we have access approved, we will develop the schedule for the work.

For a few weeks this summer, you may see workers using shovels or machines to dig up ore next to the road. They will take this radioactive material to the mine, where it came from, so that it can be managed along with the other ore and waste rock at Midnite Mine. We will put up notices in the area before the work starts

Study nearly finished, EPA now looking at cleanup options

You may remember that in 1999 EPA began a study of Midnite Mine (called a "remedial investigation and feasibility study", or "RI/FS" for short). Since that time, we have sent fact sheets and held meetings to share what we have learned about the problems at the site. We studied where mining has affected the water and soil, and estimated the risks to people and the environment.

During the study, we sent reports to the Tribe's technical experts for review. These reports describe the risks to people's health and the environment at the site. Later this summer, we will complete the study and issue a report called the Remedial Investigation. This report will describe the effects of mining—both where mining activities took place and in nearby areas downstream and downwind of the mine.

Next step: Cleanup options

While finishing the Remedial Investigation, we will also be studying ways to clean up Midnite Mine. So far, EPA has developed several possible cleanup options and the Tribe has provided comments. Late this year, we expect to publish the Feasibility Study, which will describe the cleanup options in detail. The Feasibility Study will also compare the options to each other and evaluate them based on specific criteria outlined in the Superfund regulations (*see box below*).

Based on a comparison of cleanup options, EPA will propose a cleanup plan for the mine. When the plan is released, we will send the community a fact sheet that describes the plan and the reason for EPA's recommendation. We will hold a comment period and public meeting. This will be an important opportunity for you to affect the cleanup at Midnite Mine, because community and Tribal acceptance are two criteria EPA considers when choosing a final cleanup plan.

How does EPA choose a cleanup plan?

When selecting a cleanup remedy for a site, EPA must evaluate options based on the following criteria:

- overall protection of people's health and the environment
- compliance with applicable, relevant and appropriate requirements (ARARs)
- long-term effectiveness and permanence
- reduction of the toxicity, mobility or volume of contaminants
- short-term effectiveness
- how easily the cleanup option can be carried out
- cost
- community acceptance
- Tribal or State acceptance

The following are questions often asked about the study and cleanup at Midnite Mine.

What is the problem with mining?

Mining often changes the environment dramatically. Some changes are visible: trees and soil may be removed to make way for tunnels and pits, and rocks removed and left in piles. More subtle changes may also occur because of chemical reactions that happen when rocks that were once underground are exposed to the weather. In addition, water moving through the mine can become acidic and contaminated. The contamination can be

unhealthy for plant and animal life. Midnite Mine has acid mine drainage, but it also has radioactive minerals, like uranium, naturally present at high levels underground. This is why the site became a mine. Mining brought this material to the surface. People who spend time at the mine could be exposed to more radiation than normal, which increases the chance of getting cancer.

How do you fix a problem like this?

For acid mine drainage, the key is to keep water from contacting the rocks as much as possible. For radiation (and for radon, a radioactive gas), the key is to keep people away from the source of radioactivity. One way to control both problems is to cover the materials that create acid mine drainage and the radioactive materials

(sometimes they are the same materials) with a barrier of soil and rock or some combination of soil, rock, and manufactured materials. We are evaluating ways to cover and control the mine materials to reduce acid drainage and to prevent exposure to radioactivity.

How you can prevent being exposed to radon

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas. It is odorless and tasteless, and is formed from the radioactive decay of uranium, which is found in small amounts in most rocks and soil. Some of the radon produced in the soil will move up into the air. Being exposed to high levels of radon increases a person's risk of getting lung diseases and lung cancer.

EPA recommends you test your home for radon and fix your home if the radon measures above four picocuries per liter (pCi/L). Four pCi/L is EPA's guideline for radon in air inside homes. There are many ways to reduce radon in your

home. They include sealing cracks in floors and walls or installing a "soil suction" system to remove radon gas from below the concrete floor and foundation before it can enter. For more information on reducing radon in your home, ask for a copy of EPA's "Consumer's Guide to Radon Reduction" from Randy Connolly at the Tribe's Department of Natural Resources, (509) 258-7709, extension 13. The guide is also posted online at www.epa.gov/iaq/radon/pubs.

For questions about radon or radon testing, call Davis Zhen at (206) 553-7660 or toll free at (800) 424-4372.

Site Description and Background

Midnite Mine is an inactive open-pit uranium mine eight miles northwest of Wellpinit, Washington, on the Spokane Tribe Reservation. Between 1955 and 1981, Dawn Mining company mined uranium ore at Midnite Mine. Waste rock and piles of ore and protore (lower grade ore) remain on the site. Two pits remain open and contain water; the larger, more contaminated pit is fenced to prevent access. Since 1992, Dawn has been required to collect contaminated water

flowing from the mined areas. The water is treated on-site to remove contamination and is discharged to a surface drainage that leads to Blue Creek. Trucks move sludge from the water treatment area to Dawn's mill and dispose of it in the lined tailings disposal pond at the mill. This has helped reduce the amount of contaminated water leaving the site, but a more effective and permanent control is needed to protect people's health and the environment.

continued

Site Description and Background *continued*

In May 2000, because of elevated levels of metals and radionuclides at the site, EPA added Midnite Mine to the Superfund National Priorities List of sites eligible for federal cleanup funds. The EPA

cleanup study is now wrapping up. This study is called the “Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study” or “RI/FS.”

Key EPA Reports for Midnite Mine at the Tribe’s Department of Natural Resources:

- Work Plans/Quality Assurance Plans
- Maps and Data
- Data Evaluation—including background characterization, statistical evaluations
- Ecological Risk Assessment—plans and draft reports
- Human Health Risk Assessment—plans and draft reports
- Feasibility Study - alternatives being evaluated for the site

To look at any of these reports, contact **Randy Connolly** at (509) 258-7709, ext. 13.

E-mail: connolly@spokanetribe.com

CONTACT INFORMATION

EPA

Reach us through our toll-free number during business hours: **1-800-424-4372**

For questions about the roadside ore removal, or technical questions, please call:

Ellen Hale, Project Manager

direct: **(206) 553-1215**

E-mail: hale.ellie@epa.gov

For more information on how to become involved, please call:

Debra Sherbina, Community Involvement Coordinator

direct: **(206) 553-0247**

E-mail: sherbina.debra@epa.gov

The EPA Region 10 Internet homepage: <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth>

Click on “Index,” then on “M” and scroll down to the “Midnite Mine” website.

Spokane Tribe

Randy Connolly coordinates EPA-Tribal communications on Midnite Mine and two other Superfund projects of interest to the Spokane Tribe. **Randy maintains the file of project documents (listed above) available to the public at the Tribal Natural Resources Department.** Contact Randy at **(509) 258-7709, extension 13.**

E-mail: connolly@spokanetribe.com



Alternative formats are available upon request by calling Debra Sherbina at 1-800-424-4372, ext. 0247. TTY users, please call 1-800-877-8339.

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1200 SIXTH AVENUE ECO-081
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OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING
WELLPINIT, WASHINGTON
MAY 2004*



♦ *Working with you for a better environment* ♦